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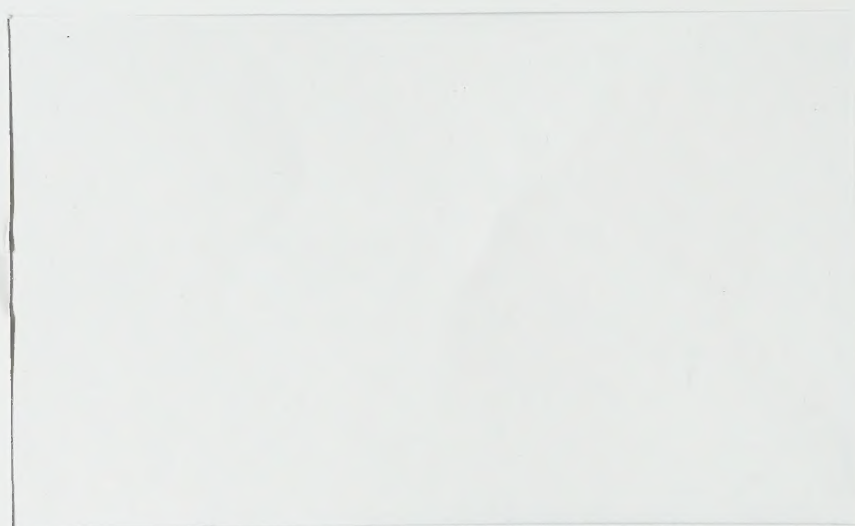
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**PRESIDING OVER THE HOUSE:
AN INTERVIEW WITH THE
OCCUPANTS OF THE CHAIR OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO**

Current Issue Paper 150



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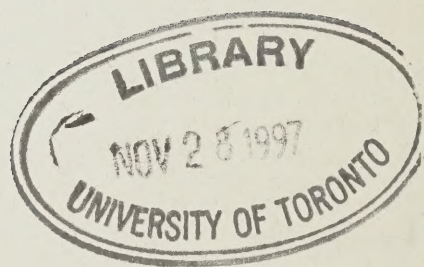
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March 1994

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INTRODUCTION

It has been two decades since the Ontario Commission on the Legislature (popularly known as the Camp Commission after its chairperson, Dalton Camp) pointed out that the Speaker of the Ontario Legislature was widely perceived to be subservient to the government of the day. As a result, the position lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the Members of the Legislature. Camp argued that only a neutral and non-partisan Speaker could win the confidence of Members on both sides of the House and preside over the Legislature with authority.

Over the years since Camp reported, the position of Speaker in Ontario has gradually attained the status of genuine independence and neutrality. Today there is no question that not only the Speaker but also his colleagues in the Chair, the Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Committee of the Whole House and the two Deputy Chairs of the Committee of the Whole House, are loyal and faithful servants of the Legislature, not the government.

The following is an interview with the Honourable David Warner (NDP—Scarborough-Ellesmere), the Speaker of the Ontario Legislature; Gilles Morin (Lib.—Carleton East), the Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Committee of the Whole House; Dennis Drainville (Independent—Victoria-Haliburton), the first Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House at the time the interview was conducted; and Noble Villeneuve (PC—Stormont-Dundas-Glengarry and East Grenville), the second Deputy Chair. They discuss the challenges facing the Chair in the Ontario Legislature and how they see their role.

THE ELECTION OF THE SPEAKER

In 1989 the Legislature amended its Standing Orders to provide that henceforward the Speaker would be formally elected by the Members of the Assembly in a secret ballot. Historically, the government proposed a candidate for Speaker (usually after informal consultations with the opposition), which the House then affirmed. The new Standing

Order was modelled on a similar amendment to the Standing Orders of the Canadian House of Commons introduced in 1985. This procedure is designed to ensure that the Chair is occupied by a Member who has the support of his or her colleagues.

Mr. Warner is the first Speaker to be elected under the terms of the new Standing Order. On November 19, 1990, at the commencement of the 35th Parliament, he won the election on the second ballot, defeating three other candidates.

Mr. Warner: I think the election of the Speaker does a couple of things. Hopefully, for the Members it provides them with a neutral basis, "We elected this person and therefore we're part of the decision, we're part of making it work." From my point of view, because the Speaker never knows the election results — you know you won, but you don't know what the votes are and you don't know who voted for you and who didn't — what it does is make you beholden to every member of the House equally.

There are no favourites. The newest Member from the third party has the same status as the Premier of the province in the eyes of the Speaker. I think that comes about in part by the election process, because you have no way of knowing who voted for you and who didn't. My nomination was put forward by a government Member and supported by an opposition Member. You start off on a footing that you've got equal allegiance and everybody's important.

SERVING IN THE CHAIR

Question: Every Speaker in a Westminster-style Legislature such as Ontario has a dual role. On the one hand, you are the Chair and you're expected to be impartial, but on the other hand, you did run, as a Member, just like all the other Members. You ran on a partisan label. You have to serve your constituents. They expect you to serve them in the same way all the other Members serve their constituents. And undoubtedly you will want to get re-elected on a party label. To what extent does being Speaker affect your ability to serve your constituents as an elected Member?

Mr. Warner: The way I explain it to constituents who ask is basically that the results will be the same; the style will be different. I have to do things more quietly than in the past. I can't put out press releases, I can't go making speeches in the House, that sort of thing. But I can be an advocate for my constituents, and if a constituent writes to me about a particular government policy he or she is upset with, I can write on behalf of the constituent to the minister and say: "My constituent is concerned about such-and-such and I think you should take a look at it." It's just a different style.

Now, admittedly I have an advantage in that this is my fourth term. The people in my area have had the pleasure or displeasure of my knocking on their doors for 20 years so they get to know me and they have, I think, a sense of trust.

I think part of what offsets that too is this sense of something being special. I've had constituents say: "Boy, it's great. Our member's the Speaker of the House. We've never had a Speaker." In 200 years, there have been very few speakers who came from Toronto, and none in living memory, so it's a unique honour and a lot of my constituents appreciate that.

I feel, and my constituents certainly express it, that I'm as effective as ever in terms of assisting them and helping solve the problems. I go about solving their problems in the way any member of the House would do. Regardless of what side you're on, when you get a practical problem to solve with respect to workers' compensation or a drug benefit or whatever, you just do it. That doesn't change, no matter who you are in the House.

Mr Morin: I still remain active in matters I consider important as an elected Member. For example, I have introduced a private Member's public bill (Bill 154, *The Government Cheque Cashing Act, 1993*), which has been debated in the Legislature and in committee. This bill addresses a serious social problem and was supported by Members on both sides of the House. I knew when I introduced it that it would not be regarded as partisan by my colleagues.

It is important for a Member who serves in the Chair to avoid partisan activities which might affect the Legislature's perception of the Chair as impartial and neutral.

My constituents are proud of my status as Deputy Speaker. They know the role that I have to fulfil. I am always available to my constituents; my role as Chair certainly does not affect my ability to serve the people of my riding. For example, I will not hesitate to approach a minister on their behalf. In fact, I suspect my status as Deputy Speaker gives me an edge vis-à-vis other Members in approaching a minister. No minister has ever refused to see me or help me.

Whenever I'm in the Chair, I know that my responsibility is to make sure first that the Members are able to express themselves. That's the main thing. When I'm in the Chair I forget that I'm a Liberal, I forget that the others are Conservatives, I forget that the others are NDP or the members of the government.

So I have no difficulty really differentiating between my role as a politician and my role as a Deputy Speaker. Once you're in the Chair, you're there to make sure that the House conducts its affairs in the proper way.

Mr Villeneuve: When I'm in my assigned seat as a Member of the Progressive Conservative Party, I can tell you, I'm anything but non-partisan. I am very partisan. However, I think human nature is such that whenever you go to that Speaker's chair, you probably go beyond, well beyond, partisan politics in attempting to leave the perception—because, as you know, perception is reality anywhere, particularly in politics—that you are at that point in time unbiased. I hope I haven't been in such a way to have hurt my own party. I don't think I have.

But there are times when you, as an occupant of the Chair, regardless of what party you were elected from, would probably tend to be even a little more severe to your own people, just to leave the impression and the perception that indeed you are attempting, as best you can, to be impartial.

I think we all take the course of action that we deem best whenever we are in the Chair and then whenever we are private Members representing a constituency and a particular political party. I think you'll probably find that the occupants of the Chair, by and large, may tend to be just a little bit less political than, say, some of the more radical or the more politicized positions that Members take from time to time, and I think that's fair game. We're certainly not hiding the fact that we're elected to a political party, and we have a job to do in that light. We can do it with a great deal of zeal, which sometimes is appreciated by some people and not appreciated by other people, and then there are other times when you do the job pure and simply with some degree of partisanship but always with the interests of your constituents in mind. That's the bottom line, the constituents first and foremost.

Mr Drainville: I really do believe that there are two kinds of people who come to Parliament. There are those who are truly partisan politicians, who see their own view, their own party's view, as being predominant and important and urgent for them to communicate. Such people are rarely good Speakers because it is difficult for them to be able to take the Chair and to see themselves in a non-partisan situation.

I'm the other kind of person. I have no difficulty at all in divorcing myself from the partisan views of my colleagues. I now sit as an Independent. [Mr. Drainville was elected to the 35th Parliament as a NDP Member. He left the government caucus to sit as an Independent on April 28, 1993. He resigned from the Legislature on September 15, 1993]. I think, in a sense, that only enhances my capacity to be able to serve in this particular role.

PRESIDING OVER THE HOUSE

Question: There's an honourable tradition in democratic legislatures that Members should not publicly criticize the Chair when he or she disagrees with a ruling. Is it a tradition here for Members to approach the Chair privately to discuss a ruling?

Mr. Warner: To be candid, I don't see nearly as many Members in my office as I would like to. I have had Members come here to discuss things they were concerned about. I think that's good and I think that's the way it should be rather than simply criticizing. You can't challenge the Speaker's ruling. I've served here when that was possible and I always felt badly about it, to tell you the truth. It was very embarrassing for the Speaker. It was done not because they didn't like the Speaker and not because the Speaker had made a bad decision; they were challenging for political reasons.

That has no place in the running of a Parliament, quite frankly. The Speaker has to make a ruling based on the rules, order, precedents, the philosophy. So you rely on the resource books, such as *Erskine May* [i.e., *Erskine May's Treatise on The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*] and *Beauchesne* [i.e., *Beauchesne's Rules and Forms of the House of Commons of Canada*]; you rely on precedents from Westminster and Ottawa and Australia and you rely on your own set of Standing Orders. You weigh all that up and you make a decision. That's fine. It's not appropriate to challenge that decision in the House. But if you're unhappy about it, go and see the Speaker. Sit down and talk to the person, find out: "Why was that decision made? What was that all about? I don't understand." That's got to be healthy; that's got to be a learning experience. I have seen a few Members, but I sure would like to see more if they are unhappy.

Mr Morin: Yes, Members have approached me, but usually to compliment me on a ruling. Occasionally, I have been criticized. However, service in the Chair is a lonely job. Obviously, it's nice to be liked, but I am not there to take sides or try to curry favour with one side or another. My duty is to be firm, fair and friendly.

Mr Villeneuve: I have had Members from all parties come along and say, "I agreed with your decision," or they will tease you, in a kind of a teasing way but yet possibly leaving a message that you gave in a little too easily on this, that or the other. It leaves you with some food for thought, if nothing else. It may be said in a joking way, it may be said in a serious way, but you as an occupant of the Chair tend to remember those comments when the next time rolls around that you have to make a decision, hopefully impartially.

I initially never realized that even if I had never taken Question Period, as an occupant of the Chair I've been in some fairly controversial debates. I've attempted to control things, and the feedback I get from the public and from my colleagues is that I do a reasonable job. You appreciate hearing that from the people to whom you're attempting to provide some sort of orderly debate. But by and large, it's given the occupants of the Chair more profile than I ever thought it would. As a member of the third party your profile sometimes tends to be a little bit overshadowed by many other people and that's fair game, but as an occupant of the Chair, constituents in my riding come along and say, "Oh, I saw you in the Chair the other day and you did seem to be

able to control reasonably well when things got hot," and you kind of get a good feeling from that.

So you take it for what it is and you try to be impartial! without stealing the show. We just cannot have the occupant of the Chair attempting, for whatever his or her reasons may be, to steal the show. It's like watching a hockey game and you're always complaining about the referee. If you watch another hockey game and the referee seems to not be there....To me, that's the way I attempt to be, yet sometimes you have to call for order and you have to remind Members that interjections are not in order, that they will have their turn to speak if indeed they want to speak and participate, and that's basically the job of the Speaker.

Mr Drainville: 130 Members is a small group of people, and you know everyone. If you make a decision which adversely affects a particular Member or even a particular party in a given debate, there are usually people who will come up to you afterwards and say to you: "You made a mistake. Why did you do that?" There are even times, perhaps, when there are charges of being unfair.

But, generally, it happens immediately after because, in Parliament, being theatre on a grand scale, people's emotions run high. People feel strongly about things, and if you've said something or done something which, in a way, has made a ruling against a particular individual or party, then they will be feeling that somehow you have done something to hurt them.

On reflection, days afterwards, people, if they've been hot towards you or intemperate towards you, will generally come back and say, "I'm sorry; I was just angry at the time," and they realize that the position that you've put forward is not one that is born from any partisanship, but rather was a decision that had to be made to maintain the order of the House.

Question: The Speaker presides over Question Period which, certainly as far as the public and, I suspect, the media are concerned, is the centrepiece of the parliamentary day. My impression is that, in so far as Members do make vocal their complaints with how the Chair performs, it's in terms of their opportunities or alleged lack of opportunities during Question Period. At the same time, as you know, many journalists and other observers would argue that Question Period is more froth than substance. Do you have any thoughts about how effective Question Period is here in Ontario?

Mr. Warner: Question Period, first of all, is very important because it's the best opportunity for the opposition to focus on the issues of the day related to the government. So Question Period, I think, in our system is paramount and it's a central focus. But, having said that, Members on the opposition side ask questions to which they already know the answers, and ministers give non-

answers as replies. So it's a game on both sides of the House. The Members have prepared their supplementaries. The ministers have their briefing books. It's theatre. I mean, that's really what it is. It's theatre. It's not Stratford but it is theatre.

I think, as far as how many people get on and the amount of time and so on, that's really determined by the Members. The Speaker can call them to order, and I do, but if any group, including the government, wants to get on more questions, all they have to do is have their Members disciplined about the length of time it takes to ask a question and to answer.

I can referee it, but if the Members are really sharp, they would make their questions crisp and really succinct. The irony is, of course, that the same is true on the other side. The ministers would make their responses short, because we allow government backbenchers to ask questions too and very few of them get on. So if the government wants to do their backbenchers a favour, they would tighten up the time.

So it's really, I think, to a very large extent, in the hands of the Members rather than the Speaker. It's up to them. We keep figures and stats, and Members occasionally ask and I provide them the figures and say, "Lookit, there's the amount of time you're using and I keep calling you to order." The irony is that all the Members know that when they go outside the chamber and they're interviewed by the press, they've got to give them 40-second sound bites.

They know that. They have to explain this whole complicated issue in 40 seconds or less. Why can't they do it in the House? They do it out of the chamber, out in the corridor. Now of course the media, especially television, has become even stricter about the sound bites they want. So they want a Member to explain in 25 seconds some complex issue as to what will cause the economy to improve.

The Members manage to get those little things in, but for some reason they find it more difficult in the House just a few minutes earlier.

THE NEUTRALITY OF THE CHAIR

Question: There is a long-running debate about how to enhance the status of the Speaker in a partisan political system. Some years ago, Stanley Knowles suggested that Parliament Hill be designated as the Speaker's constituency. Others have suggested that the sitting Speaker should run in a re-election as an Independent. Obviously, these suggestions are motivated by the notion that somehow there should be some distance between the Member who serves as Speaker and partisan politics. What are your thoughts on the neutrality of the Chair?

Mr. Warner: I think that in our parliamentary system that's essential, and there are a number of ways of achieving it. I think that under our current system we have probably achieved the maximum of what can be expected. Not only is the Speaker elected by the House in a secret ballot, but in Ontario we ensure that all the parties are represented in the functioning of the Chair. I don't want to appear immodest, but this particular group has done, I think, the best job in 200 years. There's not another team that has done a better job in terms of running the House.

The Deputy Speaker is from the official opposition, the first Chair of Committee [of the Whole House] is from the government [Note: Mr. Drainville left the government caucus to sit as an Independent on April 28, 1993], the second Chair of Committee [of the Whole House] is from the third party, and as a team of four, we work together in a cohesive way. We are friends. We have never had an argument, we've never had a disagreement and we've never had a partisan political discussion in two years. Our job, as we see it, as a team, is to run the Assembly, run the chamber, make sure that it works. In that capacity, all of us at varying times have taken flak from certain quarters.

But all of us have shared equally in the responsibility and I think the message that's come through to the Members is that it's the Chair who rules. It's not a Member of the Conservative Party or the Liberal Party or the New Democratic Party. It's the Chair who has made a decision. One of the things that's been tough to get through to some of the Members is the fact that it doesn't matter who's sitting in the Chair; the same decision will be made, and that's what's starting to come through. It's for the betterment of Parliament. That's why the decision's going to be made.

Having said that, I think there are other models that could be examined. In some countries, for example, within the Commonwealth, they have the ability of appointing someone who is not elected to be their Speaker. We recently had a visit from the Speaker of Trinidad. She was a High Court judge, well known in the country, well respected, and selected by the Prime Minister with the approval of the Leader of the Opposition to be the Speaker of the House.

She enjoys the confidence of both sides of the House. She's not elected. She's elected by the Members in the sense that when her name comes forward they have to vote for her, but she does not have her own constituency. It really frees her to do the job as a professional and to be involved in all the leadership opportunities for the Speaker and the Speaker's office. In Trinidad they can appoint someone who's elected; they have that option. They can be elected or not elected. They can appoint her. I think that's something worth taking a look at.

I think one of the things that should be looked at as a wrinkle to this is having a fixed term. . . . where you appoint someone who goes beyond the life of a Parliament, because one of the things you notice, if you walk through the hallways and look at the carvings on the wall or read any of the history books, is that the longest-serving Speaker has been six years. That's the maximum.

In a modern context, where there's so much work to be done both within the Parliament and the province and outside, you need continuity. I think we should look very seriously at the possibility of appointing someone from outside the system who would serve for a period of time longer than the life of a Parliament—it might be 7 years, it might be 10 years, whatever—as we do with the Ombudsman and a number of other positions where there's a fixed-term appointment and it's seen to be a non-partisan appointment. That's something to be examined by the Members, because the Speaker in today's Parliament has a different kind of role than 200 years ago or even 100 years ago, and hence you have to change your thinking as to how you create the position.

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

Mr. Warner: I always think one of the challenges, when you're first elected. . . . is to move from being a politician to being a parliamentarian. In the end, with all of the really deep-rooted problems, the sense of having a true democracy, the answers lie with parliaments, not with governments. Parliaments will solve those problems, and how do you reach that? One of the ways to reach it is to have a rules committee or whatever the name is, to take a look from time to time at how you modernize and in a non-partisan way come up with the rules that will suit the needs of Parliament. Not everyone has that interest, which is too bad.

There are real challenges here. We've got a committee system that is antiquated, clumsy and doesn't work very well. It really begs for reform, and as far as I can see, we're not really doing very much about it. There are all kinds of things that could be done. Westminster has altered its committee system dramatically and it's having some good effects, and Ottawa has changed its committee system and it's getting some good effects out of it and we're just spinning our wheels, which is really too bad.

In order to make it happen, you need Members from all parties who have a genuine interest in Parliament who will put pressure on and say, "We need, for the sake of Parliament, to change the way we run our committees, the composition, their mandate, everything." It needs to be overhauled completely. We've got a lot of new Members in the House, for one thing, so it's tough to expect miracles, I guess, and tough to expect a lot of things overnight, and with the huge turnovers that we've had over the last 10 years, you lose continuity. . . . We've had in the span of 10 years, three different governments. I don't know the precise numbers, but I'd be willing to bet that we've had somewhere in the neighbourhood of 200 to 250 Members who have come and gone in that period of time. So you lose stability; there are no two ways about it.

Experience cannot be purchased; experience is gained and there's no substitute for it. It doesn't matter in a sense how willing someone is, or how hardworking or anything else; you need experience. And how else do you get experience? You have to remain in for a while.

Mr. Drainville: I'm concerned about the lack of discretion on the part of the Speaker. We have curtailed significantly the role of Speaker in this Legislature; so much so, in fact, that the Speaker has very little discretion and, unfortunately, the rule of the majority ends up being tyranny by the majority in this particular place very often.

For instance, we brought in some new Standing Orders which were presented as reform measures. Now, those rules significantly curtailed the opportunity of Members to truly advance their cause in this place. In fact, it was said by the government at that time that of course the government would not always be using the new time allocation rule. What we saw in the last sitting is that time allocation was used increasingly. We will see that again in this session.

The government will always use the tools at hand; that's the way the system works. So what you have to do is ensure that there are some kinds of blocks there for the abuse of power.

I guess the last issue is the issue around independent Members. We are the only Legislature, certainly in Canada and beyond that I know of, that has Standing Orders that reflect the standing of parties as opposed to the standing of Members. Consequently, independent Members lack certain very important rights in this House.

PARTY DISCIPLINE

Mr. Warner: Party discipline in Ontario has always been very rigid, quite inflexible and, if anything, it's more rigid today than I've ever seen it. You may have witnessed some dissent on the government side, but those members

are paying quite a price for it. The same is true of the opposition Member. If the government identifies that this is a confidence item, the opposition Member would be in a lot of hot water to go voting with the government, so it serves both sides of the House extremely well.

The discipline here is more rigid than in Great Britain. One of the reasons for it, I think, is that in Great Britain the government very clearly identifies which items are confidence and which ones aren't. We don't do that here. After they've identified what's important to the government and what isn't, then it makes it easier to allow dissent.

If it's not a matter of confidence then, in a sense, so what if the government loses a vote? It's not the end of the world. If you've got a majority government, you can always afford to lose certain Members. You can still win the vote. So it's not 72 to 51, or whatever, it's 70 to 53. So what? You've still won the vote.

On a matter of conscience or the way his or her constituents feel on a subject, a Member is able to express that. I think that's healthy for the system, but ingrained in this party discipline in Ontario is the sense that you have to be with the party 100%, otherwise, you're disloyal. I think that's misplaced. I think it's wrong. I think our system would be a lot healthier in the long run if we would just allow Members to express themselves, and Parliament to express itself, for the caucuses to determine what's really important and what isn't quite so important and let people vote the way they want to. We don't do that. We don't allow members to record an abstention.

We allow voters to do that. As a citizen I can go into the polling booth, a polling station, and say to the returning officer, "I decline my ballot." I can say, "Mark my name off; I've shown up," and my ballot is marked as being declined because I didn't like any of the candidates.

Why shouldn't a Member here be able to stand up and say: "I don't like the government's position, I don't like the opposition's position, so I don't want to vote on this; I'm here, I've listened to the debate, I've participated; I don't want to vote; I'm an abstention"? We don't allow that. I'm not saying that we should adopt that, but I think we should explore that question and we're not doing that. We're not exploring it.

What we are doing is saying, "In all parties you have to vote, and the only way, if you really kick up a fuss, stay out of the House. But you can't go and vote for the other side. If you do so, boy, you're running a heck of a risk." I think that's an insecurity that really doesn't belong in a good Parliament and, unhappily, all three parties are to blame, they're all very rigid in the party discipline, in the party solidarity.

Now, you need solidarity. If you're the government, that's how you get your agenda fulfilled. If you're the opposition, that's how you show a united front against government policies.

So I understand the importance of party discipline, but we've gone too far. If I had a wish list I would put every Member, not all at once but in little groups, off to Westminster to see how they do it, because they've got a better answer. Now, they've been at it longer; they've been at it for 700 years and we haven't, but I would send all the Members over there to sit in the House of Commons, sit in the House of Lords, meet with the Speaker, meet with the Clerks, the committees, watch the committees. They would come back, I think, with a more informed and I think more relaxed view about how Parliament should function.

Mr Drainville: I think party discipline is a significant problem. We have a most extreme view of party discipline in Canada, and certainly in Ontario. We need to change that. I think we need to see more opportunities for Members to be able to disagree with their own parties, or the government, when it's in office. There should be a means of ensuring that if a government bill goes down that it does not become an issue of confidence, and there are many ways in which that can be handled.

When I've asked ministers, "When the final touches are put on legislation, where do you go to make sure you've got the kinds of things in the bill that need to be there?" rarely does a minister—in fact, a minister has never said that they listen to the debates in the House, that they listen to the debates in committee. In fact, the situation is that we are involved constantly in a debate that really never has any effect on the direction of the government and that is because of something that again is not in the Standing Orders but that is how the governmental structure in Ontario functions. That has to do with the fact that over a period of the last 30 years power has moved from the Legislature into the Premier's office and decisions are made there—whoever is the Premier, whether it's the present occupant or the occupants before. This is true not only of Ontario but of all other jurisdictions in Canada.

Consequently, that move within the government power structure has had an effect on the Members in the House, because we are no longer seen as people who have any real part in either the formulation of policy or in the passing of legislation. Rather, we are—and I hate to use this very negative term—pawns in a political game who are there to vote at the behest of our particular Premier or leader. That has an incredibly negative effect on the way Parliament functions.

There are a number of options, but you could either have a system in which confidence motions always follow the fall of any government bill, in which case the government would never be expected to fall unless there was a motion.

I think the whole approach of going to public hearings after the acceptance of the principle of the bill, after second reading, makes no sense whatsoever. I think the first thing we need to do is we need to have commissions of the Legislature, along perhaps the Swedish model or the Quebec model, where one or more Members go out on a particular issue, do as much study publicly to hear what people have to say about that issue, come back, put forth a white paper document, see how that flies and then eventually refine that document. Eventually, that becomes the principle and it should flow that way.

This will allow more input on behalf of the public on a particular issue, but it will also give Members an opportunity to have some real say in the direction that particular bill is going to end up going in. I think that's important.

I also think there should be more opportunity for private Members' bills. I think the government should not constantly block private Members' bills from being allowed. That does happen in Ontario, and it's an odious practice, in my view, that undercuts the rights of the Members of the House.

THE IMPACT OF TELEVISION AND MEMBERS' CONDUCT

Question: What impact, if any, has television had on the behaviour of Members?

Mr. Warner: On balance, I think it's had a positive effect. Members, if nothing else, tend to be better dressed. They're not as likely to exhibit unsocial behaviour. A few will grandstand for the camera, but it's not very many really. I think the downside is our own fault in that we did not prepare the public for what they were going to see.

It's not the public's fault. We didn't tell the public in advance, "Okay, when you turn on the TV, here's what you should expect." Parliament is not a church, and it's not a school; it's a Parliament where we fought for centuries to get the right to speak without reprisal, without fear of death, fear of being beaten up, and the right to speak your mind on behalf of the people you represent. Unfettered free speech is something that is a very deep guiding principle of democracy. That's what you see in there.

Sure, there's a lot of impoliteness, and there are things that people shouldn't say. So that's the Speaker's job, to call them to order for that. The Members shouldn't do that, I realize, but at the same time, to be able to debate issues in a lively, animated fashion, that's our Parliament; that's what it's about. That's what the British parliamentary system is all about. So we want to keep that.

But we didn't explain any of that to the general public, and they flipped on their TVs in 1986 or 1987 or whatever it was, and some people were just

horrified by what they saw. What they're seeing isn't any worse than what's always gone on. In fact, in some ways it will be better. In the early days, there were fistfights and swordfights among members. People got killed and beaten up and so on. All of that's gone. Members haven't resorted to that. So in fact the Members' behaviour is better today than it was 100 years ago. But we just simply didn't prepare the public. Nobody knew what was going on in here 100 years ago.

So TV, on balance, has been a good thing. Having said that, I urge better deportment by many of the Members. I think being civil and polite and listening and so on is really important in any milieu, including Parliament.

Question: Do you have any thoughts on the quality of debate and the conduct of Members in the Legislature?

Mr. Morin: I remember visiting not too long ago the House of Commons in England, and I found the British so proper. They are so proper by nature, and they have a way of telling you to go to hell in a nice way. It's because of their superb command of the language, which I wish some of our Members might emulate.

I remember Bette Stephenson, who had a way with words. On one occasion she called another Member a snake. I said, "Order please. You shouldn't use that word." She said, "Well, he's an asp." I knew what an asp was, and I corrected her, but you see, it was all in good jest.

WORKING TOGETHER

Mr. Warner: I meet every day with the Clerk, and our team—and I'll explain 'team': it's the Deputy Speaker and the two Deputy Chairs, myself, the Clerk, the two Table Officers and the Sergeant-at-Arms; a group of eight—meets once a week. We discuss what has happened in the last few days, what's likely to happen, and share information, go over some of the problems that occurred, seek advice: "This happened. Why did it happen? Was it handled the right way? What could we have done? What should we have done," and so on? We really explore the issues.

There's always informal discussion. I try, when the House is meeting, to see those I'm sharing the Chair with on a very regular basis. Every day we see each other, we chat, so there's constant communication and a sharing of information and a common purpose. Because this team of eight meets regularly we're able to have a common focus on how the place should be run, and it works. It really works.

It works because Noble and Gilles and Dennis are all prepared to put aside their partisan feelings for a common purpose of the Parliament and making the Parliament work. Otherwise, I couldn't do it by myself. It's impossible. Their cooperation has been absolutely fantastic. They are professionals. I've seen them, I've seen Noble sit in the chair and take incredible flak from his own group. His answer is: "These are the rules. These are not my rules. These are the rules of the House." You have to give so much credit to those guys because they're making it work.

Mr Morin: I have known Mr. Warner since 1985. When he returned after the 1990 election, it was easy for us to rekindle our friendship. There is a common bond of friendship and mutual respect among all four occupants of the Chair. We work together and we get along well. We know that we are here to serve the Members of the Legislature.

I find there's a good team spirit among us, a good chemistry. What we have here in Ontario is unique. The Speaker has a lot to do with that. He has the type of personality that brings people together, and that is extremely important.

Mr. Villeneuve: We do have regular meetings. It's a once-a-week deal where all the occupants of the Chair, along with the officers of the House, meet, discuss some of the different situations that may have arisen the previous week, how they were handled or how they might be handled. You have some degree of anticipation without giving away any political secrets as to some of the surprises that may be forthcoming, and we attempt to foresee any potential difficult decision that whoever is in the Chair at the time would have to make, bearing in mind always the Standing Orders and the rules of the House.

There is a degree of consultation with the Clerk and the officers of the Legislature who are the experts on the rules. I've been challenged in Committee of the Whole and the Speaker had to be called in, and in those cases he supported my ruling. We had discussed those possibilities at our previous occupants-of-the-Chair meetings and that's where I find those situations helpful.

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